

Fake Lake Intimacies: Field Notes Toward a Mad Ecopoetics

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Once a week I go to therapy in an office that overlooks a lake. At my appointment,
a jagged line snakes through the ice – a break – something ready
to arise. Perhaps eruption of spring, an end of February
hopeful wish, premature for Michigan. Open water further out.

In the sessions, we tend presence. How located I am in my experience. How
depression and bipolar waves shape distance, the blur within myself
and the world around me. Sometimes my past history
of medical interventions and weighted days tucked in bed
alter the present, thicken it.

Out the sliding glass window, the lake doesn't fool me. I admire the glint of the grey
almost-light that plays on the snow and ice. But I also see its dammed river origins.
Decades of car factory excretion settled in the silt, easily activated. The superfund
history. PFAS warnings. Inedible fish. Undrinkable water. I don't get too close.

I measure my copresence with the lake. Name the heaviness in my chest. Notice
my effortful breath. Reach to these waters, Ford Lake. Lean into its expanse
and imagine its liquid moves beneath the ice.

I grew up in this state whose map is blotted blue with countless rivers and lakes.
Water has always been an anchor even with its dangers. Yet, I feel distant.

Fake lake.

I often walk around its periphery and am almost tricked into believing in the lake.
Red-eared sliders on a log. Nesting swan in spring. Great blue heron. Beings
that have made this place home. I think of the seeds buried here
in what was once field, now dammed lake bottom. Tune into
their held vibrations, coiled potential.

I stare at the water from where I sit on the therapy office sofa, ask my gaze to soften.
But the lake feels false. Stillness where there should be tighter edges and current of
the Huron River. I feel grief for what no longer makes it downstream.

These days depression slows me, motivation circles back on itself, words stick inside
my brain. My soft gaze turns sloppy, inattentive. I want the dam to break. Lake to
reroute into river. Recede from an imposed and bloated shoreline. For those
drowned seeds to feel light's touch. Unexpected blooms.

I hold my previous shapes too tightly at times. The before and after self, a duet
that doesn't flow or change course, recursive in structure.

How does the Huron hold its memory? Do the banks feel their former textures and
dimensions? Or is it fluid, washed away?

The river is an expert at yielding – current velocity, spring melt, rainfall,
nitrogen levels, when green returns, when dams are built.

Even after years of vigilance to the swings, drags, depths and heights of moods, I can
only witness the course. Monitor how deep and wide. But I don't determine the ride.

Flooded. I am overcome. Multiple seasons in a year, sometimes a day.
Moods carve me out – loud soft – temper my movements
to necessity. Mitigate color to one tone.

River erodes obstacles pebbled smooth. Over deep time and surrender.

At the end of the appointment I glance out and realize this lake, that isn't really a
lake, is holding me in its own way. My thoughts, fears, desires, amplified and
lubricated by water that swirls with its own histories and brokenness.

I extend my arms in an unsure half circle, an attempt to embrace the lake.

Note

This piece is part of an ongoing inquiry with the Huron River, which runs through
where I live on Anishinaabe land in what is colonially called Ypsilanti, Michigan in the
United States. In these engagements, I'm exploring relation through a mad ecopoetic
lens. This means approaching toxicity, contamination, disorder, and climate disaster
as a generative friction. I'm interested in the tension between desiring what came
before, embracing how things are now, and improvising with the unknown future.
How can madness and ecopoetry inform and support us (with *us* being the human

and more-than-human world) in finding new ways to tend and be with and even love each other?

This project uses my own queer body and lived experience with madness as a site of query. I am a shock/psych system survivor who has navigated bipolar waves for decades. I'm curious about how these shifting ways of being and hard-won skills can open up space for a different kind of relationship with the changing world, and more specifically, with the local-to-me Huron River.